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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 IO-13 DHA-02 /045 W
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 2060

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB SHUM PINT KS
SUBJ: LABOR DAY - 1977

SUMMARY: ON MARCH 10 KOREAN WORKERS COMMEMORATED LABOR DAY. THE ROKG EVIDENCED NO INTENTION OF LIFTING OR MODERATING RESTRICTIONS ON FREE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING. NEITHER THE FKTU NOR CHRISTIAN LABOR GROUPS SHOWED ANY APPRECIATION FOR EACH OTHER'S PROBLEMS.
END SUMMARY

1. MARCH 10, KOREA'S LABOR DAY, WAS MARKED BY TWO CELEBRATIONS. ONE, HOSTED BY THE FKTU, MIGHT BE TERMED THE OFFICIAL: THE OTHER, ORGANIZED BY CHURCH RELATED GROUPS, THE UNOFFICIAL.

2. AT THE OFFICIAL CELEBRATION, THE FKTU SHOWED ITSELF AS THE NATION'S MAINLINE LABOR ORGAIZATION. TOP GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS (LED BY PRIME MINISTER CHO KYU-HA), BUSINESS LEADERS, AND REPRESENTATIVES OF FOREIGN LABOR MOVEMENTS PARTICIPATED. ABOUT 7,000 TRADE UNIONISTS ATTENDED, AND, ALTHOUGH ALL AGE GROUPS WERE REPRESENTED, THEY WERE MOSTLY MATURE AND MALE. THE ASSEMBLY WAS IMPRESSIVE AND DEMONSTRATED, AT LEAST TO A DEGREE, THAT THE FKTU, DESPITE ROKG INTERFERENCE AND CURBS, DESPITE FACTIONALISM AND DESPITE THE VENALITY OF SOME OF ITS LEADERS WAS STILL ALIVE.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESIDENTS OF THE KOREAN EMPLOYERS
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ASSOCIATION AND KOREA TRADERS ASSOCIATION THANKED THE WORKERS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONS'S INDUSTRIAL AND EXPORT GROWTH RATE. THE PRIME MINISTER STRESSED HARMONIOUS LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS AND CALLED THE WORKERS' ATTENTION TO ROKG PLANS TO GIVE SPECIAL IMPETUS TO SOCIAL WELFARE IN THE FOURTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN. FKTU PRESIDENT CHUNG GAVE AN ADDRESS WHICH SOME OBSERVERS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE STRONGER AND MORE INDEPENDENT GIVEN BY AN FKTU

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OFFICIAL IN SOME TIME. CHUNG DECLARED THAT THE TIME HAD COME FOR UNION MEMBERS TO MAKE SURE THAT THEIR WORK WAS SINCERELY APPRECIATED AND DULY COMPENSATED, THEREBY IMPLYING THAT THE CONGRATUATIONS AND TROPHY HE HAD JUST RECEIVED ON BEHALF OF WORKERS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATION'S ECONOMIC GROWTH WERE NOT THE KIND OF COMPENSATION WORKERS HAD IN MIND FOR THEIR LABORS. CHUNG DEVOTED MOST OF HIS SPEECH TO A PROPOSAL FOR WORKER PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT, AND ISSUE THE FKTU HAS RAISED FROM TIME TO TIME IN THE PAST.

4. NEVERTHELESS, THE ROKG'S ABILITY TO MAKE THE FKTU TOE THE LINE WAS ALSO APPARENT.A RESOLUTION CALLING UPON THE GOVERNMENT TO RESTORE LABOR'S FREEDON TO BARGAIN COLLECTIVELY WITHOUT INTERFERENCE AND TO STRIKE WAS DROPPED FROM THE LIST OF RESOLUTIONS UP FOR ADOPTION. IT SEEMED IRONIC THAT THIS CALL WHICH HAD BY NOW TRADITIONALLY BEEN AMONG FKTU RESOLUTIONS WAS DROPPED THIS YEAR WHEN THE FKTU HAD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS ACTUALLY PRESSED THE GOVERNMENT TO GRANT THE RIGHT TO STRIKE.

5. ONE OTHER RESOLUTION DROPPED FROM THE USUAL LIST WAS A CALL FOR KOREAN ENTRY INTO THE ILO. THIS WAS DROPPED BY THE FKTU BECAUSE THE BOARD APPARENTLY IS NOW LESS CERTAIN MEMBERSHIP IN THE ILO WILL BE WORTHWHILE GIVEN THE POSSIBILITY THE US MIGHT WITHDRAW FROM THE ORGANIZATION.

6. THE UNOFFICIAL COMMEMORATION OF LABOR DAY WAS IN TWO PARTS. A GROUP OF CHURCHMEN AND SOCIALLY CONCERNED LAYMEN INCLUDING MYONGDONG DEFENDANT AN PYONG-MU MET AT AN OVERNIGHT SEMINAR AT A CONVENT IN SEOUL MARCH 9. THEY REPORTEDLY DISCUSSED A WIDE CONFIDENTIAL

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RANGE OF LABOR AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS - FOCUSING ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE POOR, THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SHARED IN THE NATION'S ECONOMIC PROGRESS. THEY MAY ALSO HAVE DRAFTED THE RESOLUTUIONS WHICH WERE TO BE ADOPTED AT A PUBLIC LABOR DAY CEREMONY IN MYONGDONG CATHEDRAL.

7. THE LABOR DAY SERVICE IN THE MYONGDONG CATHEDRAL IN THE EVENING OF MARCH 10 WAS ECUMENICAL AND WAS SPONSORED BY THE SOCIAL MISSION COUNCIL OF THE KNCC AND THE NATIONAL PRIEST'S CORPS FOR THE REALIZATION OF JUSTICE. ABOUT 1500 PERSONS ATTENDED. MOST OF THE WORKERS PRESENT WERE YOUNG - ABOUT 20 YEARS OLD AND OFTEN YOUNGER - AND GIRLS OUTNUMBERED BOYS.

8. BISHOP CHI HAK-SUN SOUNDED THE THEME FOR MOST SPEAKERS WITH HIS CHARGE THAT DESPITE 10 YEARS OF ECONOMIC PROGRESS THE LOT OF THE WORKER HAS NOT IMPROVED. MANY CALLED FOR PROMPT ENFORCEMENT OF EXISTING LABOR LAWS AS A FIRST STEP IN IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR WORKERS. SPEAKERS WEREHIGHY CRITICALOF THE ROKG, AND ONE, REF. YI CHAE-CHONG ASSERTED THAT THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE WORKERS WERE

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DUE TO THE "TYRANNY OF ONE MAY IN POWER". DESPITE THE STRONG WORDS THERE WERE NO ARRESTS NOR DID THE POLICE INTERFERE WITH MEETING OR THOSE WHO ATTENDED.

9. COMMENT: AT LEAST THREE THEMES HAVE CHARACTERIZED THE KOREAN LABOR MOVEMENT OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS: (A) THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUING PATERNALISTIC AND RESTRICTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS; (B) THE FKTU'S SCHIZOPHRENIA - THE ORGANIA-ATION WHICH REPRESENTS MANY SKILLED WORKERS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TANGIBLE BENEFITS FROM THE ROK "ECONOMIC MIRACLE" TENDS TOFAVOR ROKG PLANS FOR RAPID GROWTH, BUT THE FKTU CHAFES UNDER RESTRICTIONS ON COLLECTIVE ACTION, FOR MANY OF ITS UNIONS BELIEVE THEY HAVE THE POWER TO GET BETTER WAGES TRHOUGH FREE BARGAINING; (C) THE SPLIT IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT BETWEEN THE FKTU AND THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL GROUPS WHO WORK WITH THE POOR WORKERS WHO HAVE BEEN BYPASSED BY KOREA'S ECONOMIC PROGRESS. LABOR DAY SHOWED THAT THESE THEMES ARE STILL VALID.
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